

THE SALTSHAKER

A PUBLICATION OF COVENANT REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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Are We Experiencing the Communion of the Saints?

By Rev. Sean McCann

We all know this phrase, you've probably said it at least once a month for the entirety of your Christian life: "I believe in the...communion of the saints." As with everything that we repeat often, this phrase – along with the rest of the Apostles' Creed – can become rote and practically meaningless. Have you ever paused to consider what it is that we are confessing? What is this communion, and who are the saints with whom we are supposed to have it?

Church historians tell us that in this short phrase we confess at least three foundational truths: we have vital communion with God (John 15:4, Phil 3:8, 1 John 1:3); we have communion with the saints who have gone before and are now in heaven (Heb 12:22, Rev 6:9-11); and we have communion with the saints who are still with us here on earth (1 Cor 3:21). I recently preached on the first truth from John 15, and taught on the second truth during Sunday School from Hebrews 12, so I want to take this opportunity to consider the third truth by proposing and attempting to answer a specific question: how can we as a church live out the reality of our communion together in Christ? Or to put it another way, how can we be sure that our fellowship really is in Christ?

I think one of the continual dangers facing every church is the temptation for her members to form their unity and corporate identity around common cultural expressions instead of in Christ. Most churches will claim that it is only Christ that unites them, yet who can deny that our churches tend to take on certain characteristics and similarities that can come to define our fellowship and relationships more than Christ does. These similarities are multitude, but some of the more common church identities found today includes political views, socio-economic status, race, generation, and musical style.

One of the more powerful testimonies I've heard about overcoming cultural differences in the church was from an Israeli pastor whose congregation was made up of

both Israeli and Palestinian Christians. Needless to say there were a multitude of different political views in his congregation, but the members worked hard to center their fellowship and community around their communion in Christ. We live in a less volatile context, but has that just made us blind to the things that tend to unify us instead of Christ? It should be our goal in the church to make Christ the *only* foundation for our communion and relationships, and to resist the temptation to find unity and fellowship around anything else.

Jerry Bridges offers some help to those churches who want to develop a more Christ-centered fellowship in his book *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia*. ("Koinonia" is the Greek word most often translated "fellowship".) He identifies three headings to best understand and grow in true fellowship within the church, and I want to examine them briefly here.

A Spiritual Fellowship.

In some ways this is a redundant phrase, but he uses it intentionally to highlight the centrality of the spiritual in our Christian relationships. We are in spiritual fellowship with other Christians not on the basis of a shared interest or hobby, but because of our shared fellowship with God through Christ. In salvation we are adopted by our heavenly Father and thus made children of God, and by this adoption we are brought into a new family, a family filled with our new brothers and sisters in Christ. This part of salvation is not optional, no matter how much we may resist our new siblings! Bridges reinforces this when he writes "spiritual fellowship involves mutual commitment and responsibility. We must commit ourselves to faithfulness in getting together, openness and honesty with one another, and confidentiality in what is shared." The church is unlike any earthly institution, for nowhere else are you called to commit your time, energy, emotions, and resources to a collection of people with whom you may have nothing in common except for Christ. This level of commitment

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Upcoming Events

March and April		Weekly Events	
March 4	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	Sunday:
March 4	Noon	Elder Groups	Opening Exercises 9:30 am
March 11	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Sunday School 9:45 am
March 18	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	Morning Worship 11:00 am
March 18	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Evening Worship 6:00 pm
March 25	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	Wednesday Evenings:
March 29	6:00 pm	Passover Meal	Supper 6:00 pm
April 1	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	Bible Study/Prayer 6:45 pm
April 1	Noon?	Congregational Meal???	Bible Study
April 8	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	For Men:
April 15	11:00 am	The Lord's Supper	Men's Prayer Breakfast 8:00 am
April 15	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	ROMEOS 8:00 am
April 22	6:00 pm	Evening Worship	(Retired Old Men Eating Out)
Aoruk 29	6:00 pm	The Lord's Supper	at J&S Cafeteria, River Ridge
			Norm Bomer's Home 7:00 pm
			For Women:
			Carol Belz's Home 9:30 am
			Fellowship Hall 10:30 am
			Debbie Cate's Home 7:00 pm

Except for 1st Sundays

2nd & 4th Saturdays
Every Thursday

1st & 3rd Thursdays

Every Tuesday
Every Wednesday
1st & 3rd Thursdays

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and self-sacrifice is radical in our day, but it is nothing short of God’s plan for his family.

A Suffering Fellowship

Under this next heading, Bridges identifies that suffering for Christ is one of the primary ways in Scripture that Christians are shown to grow in communion with Christ (Rom 8:17; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24; 1 Peter 4:13). Additionally, since “Christ regards the sufferings of believers as His suffering (Acts 9:4-5), it follows that we can share in the fellowship of His sufferings as we identify with other believers who suffer.” As we seek to mourn with those who mourn, we begin to see the burdens of those around us and seek to take part of the burden on ourselves. The church is a place where no one should suffer alone. That doesn’t mean we have to broadcast every pain on the prayer list, but it does mean we should strive together for a level of openness and transparency that can only be brought about by the Spirit. Consider our conversations together: are we speaking to one another in ways that invite open and honest communication about our joys and sorrow, our doubts and struggles? Or do we put up walls by speaking only platitudes and half-truths - peppered with judgment and gossip - that effectively tell others to keep their distance and their problems to themselves?

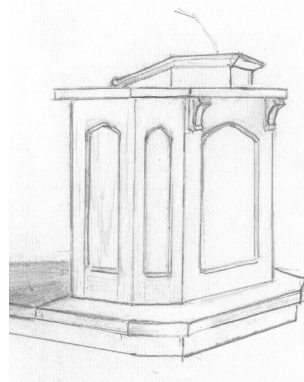
A Serving Fellowship

“The concept of servanthood is basic to the biblical practice of koinonia,” Bridges writes, because “fellowship involves sharing what we have with others. One of the most valuable things we can share is ourselves: our time, talents, and energies in serving one another.” One offshoot of serving the body of Christ is that it often deepens our experience of spiritual fellowship with one another. I can think of countless relationships that have been formed or deepened through mission trips, service projects, or simply while taking out trash after a church meal. If you want to grow deeper in your fellowship with others in the church, then I suggest you find some areas to serve alongside your brothers and sisters.

Martin Luther has famously said – influenced by Augustine – that human nature, corrupted by sin, is deeply turned in on itself: we are so fixated on ourselves that we have little concern for God or neighbor. While he was speaking of the individual, I think the principle holds true for the church. We must guard against our sinful and self-centered tendencies to become so fixated on ourselves and our preferred relationships that we push God to the outskirts. May we continue to grow outward, away from ourselves and towards a rich and diverse community centered on Christ alone.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



As we turn our attention on Sunday mornings from the New Testament to the Old, I find there are a number of parallels between our previous series (*Titus: A Sound Church*), and our new one (*Haggai: Building God’s House*). In fact, we could probably link these two series together under the same heading: “Putting God’s House in Order.” In Titus we find that the teaching of sound doctrine not only guards the church from false teachers, but even more it builds up God’s church in a clear understanding of both the gospel and good works. In Haggai we find a prophet sent to God’s people who very much embodies the type of leadership that God instructs Titus: “Declare these things, exhort and rebuke with all authority, let no one disregard you” (2:15). Haggai faced a religiously indifferent people and was called to the task of leading them to rebuild the Temple.

And after the people responded in obedience and began construction on the Temple, Haggai continued his ministry to encourage and strengthen them in the task. Both books remind us that as Christians we live in a community of redeemed sinners, indwelt by God, and intended to shine his glory in the world.

At the end of March we will begin an evangelistic series entitled *What’s Next?* Starting on Palm Sunday and running for five weeks I will preach from various texts on the themes of death, resurrection, judgment, and eternal life. The goal of this series is twofold: first, I hope to inform and strengthen our membership as we “wait for [our] blessed hope” (Titus 2:13); and secondly, I want to encourage each of you to take this opportunity to invite friends and neighbors to come and hear what the Lord has to say about eternal life. To that end we have made up cards for you to use to invite others to church over these five weeks. Please join us in praying that the Lord would not only bring unbelievers to hear his gospel, but that he would open their hearts to believe.

Finally, I am tentatively planning to start a series though the book of Acts at the end of April, and if that is indeed the path we follow, you’ll be sure to hear more in the next edition of the Saltshaker.

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
Mar. 4	Haggai 2:1-9	
Mar. 11	Haggai 2:10-19	John 16:16-33
Mar. 18	Haggai 2:20-23	John 17:1-5
Mar. 25	Rom. 5:12-21	John 17:6-19
Apr. 1	1 Cor. 15:1-34	
Apr. 8	1 Thess. 4:13-18	John 17:20-26
Apr. 15	Rev. 20:11-15	John 18:1-27
Apr. 22	Rev. 21:1-8	John 18:28-19:16
Apr. 29	Acts 1:1-5	John 19:16-42

Session Update

By Tom Voigt

Last Fall members of the administration of the University of North Carolina at Asheville approached us with a proposal to develop our gravel parking lot and the Kudzu pit into paved parking, to go along with a contiguous parcel of land they own that goes up to Barnard Ave. UNCA's initial idea was to develop this additional parking at their expense with CRPC providing a fifty year lease on the land to them for \$1.00/ year.

As we began discussing UNCA's proposal, it came out that there is an underground stream that runs through the Kudzu pit that was going to be a problem for us to deal with on our own due to the complexity of working with the Army Corp of Engineers. In fact, we came to the realization that we would probably never be able to develop that part of our property. However, UNCA developing the property is an entirely different matter due to their financial strength, as well as having the power of the State of North Carolina behind them. We began to sense that the Lord was protecting us by providing the only possible solution for this problem simultaneously with our discovery of it.

As our discussion continued with UNCA it became clear that the simplest path was for UNCA to purchase the property from CRPC and lease the use back to us. This made sense because of issues like long-term liability indemnity. Again, we felt the Lord’s hand of protection and provision as we realized we might have all our long term parking needs satisfied, as well as benefit financially.

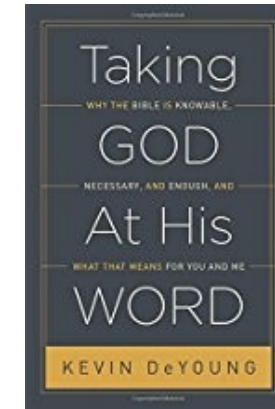
Please pray with the Session, that (1) we would follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in the coming months; (2) the Lord would go before us and protect our steps as we proceed; and (3) the Lord would use the ministry of CRPC in a mighty way. In our Presbyterian form of government, each individual congregation has the right of ownership and control of their own property, so this decision is entirely ours as a congregation. Since there are many things that can go wrong with this plan in the coming months, let us all commit to lift it up in prayer so that we may enjoy together this adventure the Lord has put us on and be encouraged as we see Him at work.

Please feel free to talk to a member of the Session or Diaconate if you have questions. We are also grateful to have Scott Carter and Dennis Ponder assisting us as we think through legal contracts and land development. We will keep you updated as important components fall into place.

In your service, Tom Voigt

Taking God at His Word

by Rev. Sean McCann



As I sit at my desk on a Wednesday afternoon, I can count over a dozen different Bibles in my office, among them various translations and languages, and that is not counting the hundred or so pew Bibles down the hall in the Sanctuary and the innumerable versions just a few clicks away on my laptop and smartphone. Truly we live in an age with no shortage of God’s word, and yet surveys tell us that biblical illiteracy rates may be at an all-time high in our country, and

the church is no exception. With that in mind, I want to wholeheartedly recommend *Taking God at His Word: Why The Bible Is Knowable, Necessary, and Enough, and What that Means for You and Me* by Kevin DeYoung. DeYoung wrote this short book to answer three simple questions: what should Christians believe about the Word of God? What should we feel about the Word of God? And what should we do with the Word of God? In answering these questions he both grounded my confidence in the Word, and deepened my love for it, and I’m left convinced that were every Christian to read this book, those biblical illiteracy rates would dramatically reverse course.

The body of the book is taken up with the doctrine of the word and works through four of the main attributes of Scripture: its sufficiency, perspicuity (“which, for a word that means clarity, is not all that clear”), authority, and necessity. Each chapter is succinct, clear, and helpful, but I think my favorite chapter in the volume is entitled “Christ’s Unbreakable Bible,” in which DeYoung attempts to explain what Jesus believed about the Bible. To me this was a novel question with serious ramifications, for surely “we are wise to believe about the Scriptures whatever Jesus believed about the Scriptures.” DeYoung argues convincingly that Jesus had the highest possible view of Scripture, concluding:

It is impossible to revere the Scriptures more deeply or affirm them more completely than Jesus did. Jesus submitted his will to the Scriptures, committed his brain to studying the Scriptures, and humbled his heart to obey the Scriptures. The Lord Jesus, God’s Son and our Savior, believed his Bible was the word of God down to the sentences, to the phrases, to the words, to the smallest letter, to the tiniest specks – and that nothing in all those specks and in all those books in his Holy Bible could ever be broken.

May he give us all this same reverence and confidence in his word!